DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 314 720 CS 009 899

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TITLE Holistic Approaches to the Remediation of Difficulties in Reading Fluency.
PUB DATE 89
NOTE 12p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Education; Reading Difficulties; *Reading Strategies; *Remedial Reading; Teaching Methods; *Whole Language Approach
IDENTIFIERS Neurological Impress Method; *Reading Fluency; Repeated Readings

ABSTRACT

Holistic approaches to remedial reading can be effective in promoting the reading growth of poor readers. Learning to read is most effective when it occurs in a context of functional and meaningful literacy activity. In order to create such a context students need to be engaged with real texts in a search for meaning. Repeated readings, taped readings, the Neurological Impress Method, and phrase-cued texts help readers deal with real texts. Each of these approaches, and variations and combinations that can be developed by creative and insightful teachers, offer remedial teachers proven techniques for developing fluency in holistic and meaningful ways. (Twenty-one references are attached.) (RS)

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Holistic Approaches to the Remediation of Difficulties in Reading Fluency

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The 1980's has seen a movement develop in classroom reading instruction that is moving away from a sequenced subskills orientation inherent in basal reader approaches and toward an approach that is more holistic. In holistic approaches focus of reading instruction is placed on whole texts, stories, and books and on the functional and meaningful uses of reading and writing. A popular name for this new approach is whole language. This holistic orientation is not so much a program as it is an instructional philosophy that suggests that learning to read is optimized when the context for reading instruction reflects the purposes and functions that occur in real life reading. That is, students learning to read should be given real books and stories to read with attention focused on gaining meaning from the text as opposed to the mastery of some abstract skill related to reading.

Both the professional and popular literature related to teaching and reading instruction have witnessed an increase in the number of articles advocating a whole language approach to regular classroom reading education (e.g. Baskwill, 1988a; Baskwill, 1988b; White, Vaughan, & Rorie, 1986). In these articles writers describe actual classrooms in which a holistic approach is employed and advocate its further development and use in regular classrooms.

Nevertheless, despite inroads made by whole language advocates into classroom reading instruction, corrective or remedial instruction tends, even now, to be dominated by a skills oriented, diagnostic-prescriptive approach (Allington, 1987). In this approach diagnosis is a search for deficits in underlying skills related to reading. Remediation is aimed at correcting those deficient skill areas. This is usually done through drill and practice activities and worksheets

that focus on the target skill. Allington (1987) argues that such an approach is at least partially responsible for the failure of special remedial programs in reading to improve the reading performance of students enrolled in them. Despite research evidence that points to the promise of more holistic approaches to corrective and remedial instruction, most school-based remedial programs remain committed to a skills-based approach.

Holistic Approaches Help Poor Readers

In this article I want to argue that holistic approaches to remedial reading can indeed be effective in promoting reading growth of poor readers. Moreover, I will describe several holistic approaches for dealing with problems in reading fluency, an area of reading that is often neglected in regular and remedial instruction (Allington, 1983; Rasinski, in press).

In this article holistic refers to reading instruction that is primarily focused on whole texts or large chunks of written discourse. Texts used in holistic reading instruction should never be less than 50 words in length and usually often longer. In addition, texts should not be contrived as they often are in remedial programs which use the texts to teach or reinforce individual skills (e.g. Seth and Roth Smith thought they should, brush their teeth). Moreover, the reader's attention in reading such texts should be continuously refocused on comprehension.

Repeated Readings. One of the most well-documented holistic approaches to remedial or corrective instruction in reading is the method of repeated readings (Samuels, 1979). The method is based on the premise that to become proficient in nearly any activity. One

needs to practice through repititions of a complex series of events. Athletes repeatedly practice particular shots, blocks, movements, or techniques. Musicians make multiple repetitions of one piece until they achieve an acceptable level of proficiency. Even learning to ride a bicycle requires many repetitions of the basic motions involved in riding. In learning to read the same principle holds. And, the practice should be over one text until a criterion level of mastery is achieved.

Samuels (1979) found that the facilitative effects of repeated readings not only were apparent with each repetition of the same passage but also transferred to texts that had not been attempted previously. Repeated readings has been found to lead to improvements in comprehension, rate and word recognition accuracy (Samuels, 1979; Dowhower, 1987;1989). Poorer readers, in particular, have been found to benefit from repeated readings.

Dowhower (1989) offers some suggestions for employing the method. Among them are the following: (1) Use relatively short passages-50 to 300 words. (2) Choose passages from any type of material students are likely to read. This includes basal readers, children's literature, dictated stories, newspaper articles, etc.. (3) Students should be able to read initially 85% of the words in a selection. Word recognition accuracy below 85% is too difficult. (4) Have students working on several passages at any one time rather than practicing on only one passage until being permitted to move on to a new one. (5) Set a goal for students to achieve in their practice reading. Usually this goal is established in terms of reading rate and, in the past, has been set between 85 and 120 WPM.

One potential difficulty in using the repeated readings method is

maintaining students' desire to practice their passages. Dowhower's (1989) suggestion for using several passages at a time with students can help overcome perceived boredom. Rasinski and Rasinski (1986) offer other suggestions for maintaining students' interest in repeated readings. Having students chart their performance so that they can observe their own progress and allowing students to perform texts that they have mastered for others are two ways of helping to maintain motivation.

Taped Readings. Related to the notion of repeated readings is an approach that is particularly helpful when students' word recognition abilities are severely restricted. In this approach students are given a written text, a cassette tape recorder, and a tape on which an oral version of the text is presented. Students are assigned to read the text while listening to the tape as many times as necessary until they can read the text on their own. As with repeated readings the focus is on whole and meaningful texts as opposed to lists of words, an isolation or contrived texts.

Studies by Carbo (1978) and Chomsky (1979) have shown that taped readings can be a particularly potent method for helping less able readers. In the Chomsky (1976) study, for example, third-grade students who had had minimal success in previous attempts at learning to read were instructed to learn assigned texts on their own with the help of the tape recorded passage until unassisted fluency on that passage was achieved. At that point, teacher directed instruction focused on within text components of language and reading. Chomsky reported gains in reading from this approach where previously little progress had been detected.

Carbo (1978) used her "talking book" method with eight learning disabled students in grades two through six. The students were given three three month treatments of reading books that had been tape recorded by the author herself. Each three month segment employed a variation of the "talking books" approach (whole books, portions of books). Students read the texts with the assistance of the tape until they could read independently. Over the nine months of the study the students made average gains of 17 months in word recognition. One student gained an extraordinary 15 months in one three month segment. These gains are all the more amazing when considering that these students, in the past, made gains in reading that were well below averag
e.

Neurological Impress Method. Although the Neurological Impress Method (NIM) is burdened with a rather sophisticated name, the approach is relatively simple and powerful. In the NIM a student and teacher are paired and are assigned to work on one passage. In the initial stages of reading the teacher reads the passage aloud and instructs the students to follow along a few words or so behind the teacher and in a softer voice. The teacher must be sure to read expressively and with proper phrasing. As the student gains confidence and control in his reading during these sessions with the teacher, the teacher begins to release control of the reading to the student. That is, the teacher's voice becomes softer as the student's increases and the teacher may actually lag behind the student's reading. Rather than practice one passage repeatedly in this manner, it is advocated that during any NIM session the teacher and student attempt to cover as many pages of text as possible.

In one of the first studies of the method Heckelman (1969) employed the NIM with middle and secondary school students who were

reading at least three years below grade placement. Students and teachers engaged in NIM 15 minutes per day, five days per week, for six consecutive weeks. A total, then, of 7 1/4 hours were devoted to the program. Students in the NIM treatment made gains averaging 1.9 years in comprehension as measured by an oral reading test. Other studies since Heckelman's (1969) early study have substantiated the positive effects of NIM on reading performance (Cook, Nolan, & Zanotti, 1980; Langford, Slade, & Barnett, 1974).

One potential difficulty of the NIM is that it requires considerable amounts of a teacher's time, working with one student. An alternative to this arrangement places students in reading dyads in which one student is designated a lead reader and the second student is the assisted reader. The lead reader takes over the role of the teacher (Eldredge & Butterfield, 1986).

Eldredge and Quinn(1988) implemented the reading dyad variation of the NIM with a group of 32 poor second-grade readers who were each matched with a partner who was a good reader. For all classroom reading assignments the dyads read the assigned texts simultaneously. Students were kept in the dyad program until their teachers determined that such practice was no longer necessary. Some students were discontinued in 2 1/2 months while others remained involved in the program for nine months.

When compared with a matched control group of poor readers not in the dyad program on a standardized test of reading achievement it was found that poor readers participating in the reading dyad program more than doubled the gains of the control group in vocabulary, comprehension, and overall growth in reading.

Also related to NIM are two related holistic approaches that teachers can use to create variety in the classroom. These are choral reading and echo reading. In choral reading a group of readers simultaneously and orally read one text. Each reader is supported by the reading of the group. In echo reading one reader reads the text a phrase or sentence of the first reader while looking at the text. As in NIM, the reading of one student is supported by the reading of a teacher or other fluent model or by a group of readers. With such support less able readers can gain control of their reading and move toward independence.

Phrase-cued Texts. It has been hypothesized that one of the factors contributing to poor readers lack of progress in reading is an underdeveloped ability to phrase or chunk written texts into meaningful units (Sehreiber, 1980). It has been demonstrated, for example, that poorer readers are less sensitive to phrase boundaries in written texts than good readers (Kleiman, Winograd, & Humphrey, 1979; Rasinski, 1985).

Repeated readings seems to be one method for helping students develop greater awareness and control of phrasing in reading. Another approach is to explictly cue phrase boundaries in texts for readers (Allington, 1983). Perhaps the easiest way for a teacher to phrase texts is to lightly pencil in slashes or vertical lines in the text at the appropriate points within and between sentences.

Several studies over the past four decades have demonstrated the facilitative effects of phrase-cued texts in improving reading comprehension and fluency(Rasinski, 1988). These studies have shown that marking phrase boundaries is particularly helpful for less able readers and readers who have hearing impairments. The phrase cues

help readers process text more meaningfully and more efficiently. Despite the apparent potential of cueing phrase boundaries for helping poor readers, the approach is seldom seen in remedial, clinical or developmental reading instruction.

Conclusion

Outlined here are four approaches for helping students develop proficiency in reading fluency. Each shares in the assumption that learning to read is most effective when it occurs in a context of functional and meaningful literacy activity. In order to create such a context students need to be engaged with real texts in a search for meaning. Repeated readings, taped readings, NIM, and phrase-cued texts help readers deal with real texts. Each of the approaches helps to intensify the comprehension process so that, although fluency is developed, meaning remains the focus of instruction and reading.

Difficulties in reading fluency are a major factor contributing to the lack of satisfactory progress in a majority of elementary grade readers. Yet fluency has been a relatively neglected area of the regular and corrective reading curricula. Nevertheless, reading fluency instruction should be a daily part of reading instruction. The approaches described in this paper, and the variations and combinations that can be developed by creative and insightful teachers, offer remedial teachers proven techniques for developing fluency in holistic and meaningful ways.

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